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DILL PICKLES

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information and Nathan Koenig, Division of Marketing Programs, broadcast Thursday, September 7, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

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WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington --- and its Thursday --- which means Ruth Van Deman is here to speak for the Bureau of Home Economics, and then Elizabeth Pitt of the Forest Service is going to take us on another of those tours of the National forests.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

And, Mr. Koenig.

KADDERLY:

Yes, Nate, I didn't intend to overlook you. I understand you're turning home-economist for-a-day.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Picklemaker-for-a-month, isn't it?

NATHAN KOENIG:

Yes -- I guess it is just about a month since I put those cucumbers down in brine and dill.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, if they're all as good as that sample you brought me yesterday.

KOENIG

I just followed the recipe.

VAN DEMAN:

No floaters, no hollow pickles.

KOENIG:

No, not one even shriveled.

KADDERLY:

Wait, you two. You're going too fast. Let's have this pickle story from the start.

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Koenig, it's really your story.

KOENIG:

Well, you see it was this way, Wallace. I like pickles -- especially dill pickles. And when I was out on the farm about a month ago I brought back some fine cucumbers --- pickled 'em myself too so I know they were good --- about a half a bushel. And then I called up Miss Van deman ---

(over)

KADDERLY:

Wanted you to make the pickles for him, eh?

VAN DEMAN:

No, he didn't even hint that. All he asked for was a recipe --- whether the Bureau of Home Economics had a recipe for making dilled cucumbers.

KADDERLY:

Is she just protecting you, Nate?

KOENIG:

No, that's right. All I wanted was some instructions, reliable instructions. I decided I'd be scientific about it this year. I've made pickles before --- or tried to. I didn't have much luck though --- most of them spoiled. Guess I let the cucumbers stand around too long before I put them into the brine. And I didn't measure the water and the salt very carefully.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, it is pretty important to have the cucumbers fresh, and the brine the right strength.

KOENIG:

Yes, I followed that recipe you gave me right to the letter. Took it down in the basement with me, too. And kept it in my pocket while I washed the cucumbers, and packed 'em in a big stone crock. And I made up the brine exactly as it said --- a pound of salt to two gallons of water, and a pint of vinegar.

VAN DEMAN:

One pound of salt, two gallons of water, and a pint of vinegar --- yes, that's the standard for dilled pickles. And what about the dill-- did you use fresh or dried?

KOENIG:

Fresh. I bought a big bunch at the farmers' market after I got home with the cucumbers.

VAN DEMAN:

Did you put some of the dill in the bottom of the jar and some on top?

KOENIG:

That's right. And I put mixed pickle spices in the bottom.

VAN DEMAN:

And some garlic. Tell all -- I'm sure I caught a whiff of garlic in your sample.

KOENIG:

Yes, I took one of those little clusters of garlic bulbs and smashed it, and put that in with the spices.

VAN DEMAN:

Whee!

KOENIG:

Wasn't that right?

VAN DEMAN:

Oh, yes. But you didn't need to mash it. You'd have had garlic flavor even from one or two cloves dropped in whole.

KOENIG:

I wanted to be sure--- You know that business of taking the scum off the top of the brine on the pickle jar, I think that's very important.

VAN DEMAN:

Did you do it every day?

KOENIG:

Sure I did --- just as regularly as I came to work. If I forgot it in the morning I did it at night.

VAN DEMAN:

You're quite right, that scum does have a lot of wild yeasts, and molds, and bacteria in it. It's a kind of product of the fermentation process the pickles are going through. And if you let it stay on the top of the brine the pickles get soft and begin to spoil.

KOENIG:

That's what happened to mine last year. And I didn't know I had to weight them down either. I just let them float up to the top of the brine. But I've got them anchored down this time, with a plate and a stone.

VAN DEMAN:

And temperature has a lot to do with making dill pickles right. They shouldn't be where it's too hot, or where it's really cold.

KOENIG:

I've had mine down cellar. I expect the temperature there has been in the seventies.

VAN DEMAN:

That's good --- anywhere from 70 to around 85 degrees. That lets the lactic-acid bacteria work at just about the right speed to cure and get that good dilled flavor.

KOENIG:

Tell me this. What do I do to store these pickles for winter? I'm not sure there'll be any left by that time. I began sampling them just as soon as they'd been in brine two weeks.

VAN DEMAN:

Have to roll up your sleeve when you dip in now?

KOENIG

I just have to see how they're getting on.

VAN DEMAN:

If you should have any left by the time they're fully cured --- and you know the way to tell that is when they get that translucent look --- when there are no white places left when you cut one open -- they're a clear olive green all through --- and they have that crisp, juicy, dill pickle texture.

KOENIG:

Oh, boy, I've got my teeth in one now.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, if you should have any of your dilled cucumbers left to store for winter, pack them in glass jars sterilized first in boiling water. And strain the brine to get out any sediment, boil it, let it cool, and then pour this brine over the pickles and seal up the jars airtight.

KOENIG:

Glass jars you say.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, glass not tin, or any other metal. The vinegar might corrode it. And by the way I'd like to broadcast a warning to everyone who's making pickles not to use any galvanized iron utensils or copper kettles. The action of the acid on the galvanized iron or copper may form some very poisonous compounds, which the pickles will absorb. When pickles have to stand, keep them in crockery or glass. And when you have to heat them, let the kettle be enameled ware or aluminum.

Excuse me, Mr. Koenig, I didn't mean to take leave of your dilled cucumbers quite so abruptly.

KOENIG:

Another week or so and I think the cucumbers will be cured ready to put in jars. But I'm going to start some green tomatoes dilling, as soon as I can get to the farm to pick them.

VAN DEMAN:

Good. They're one of Mrs. Yeatman's favorites.

KOENIG:

Is she the lady I met in your office?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, she's the one chiefly responsible for our recipes for homemade pickles and relishes. She's done a lot of experimenting through the years.

KOENIG:

She told me to go ahead with the green tomatoes just the way I did the cucumbers.

VAN DEMAN:

Exactly the same -- that's right. And if you want, you can make them up into sweet pickles later.

KOENIG:

No, plain dills are good enough for me.

KADDERLY:

Well, I can't stay out of this conversation any longer. Nate, as I've listened to your story I'm convinced you're quite a pickle maker. Any time you feel like it, I'm receptive to a sample too.

KOENIG:

Just you wait --

VAN DEMAN:

You'll have everybody asking you for a bite.

KADDERLY:

I'll try to share. I don't know that I can promise complete co-operation. But how about your folder of pickle recipes. If anybody in the radio audience wants a copy of those recipes for homemade pickles and relishes, is the Bureau of Home Economics prepared to share them?

VAN DEMAN:

All prepared I'm very sure.

KADDERLY:

I'll just repeat that title -- Homemade pickles and relishes. Write to the Bureau of Home Economics here in Washington, D. C., and ask for Homemade pickles and relishes. This folder has a dozen or more recipes for making pickled fruits and vegetables, including the dilled cucumbers and green tomatoes that Nat Koenig has now made famous.

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